

FIELD & FEEDLOT

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION AND OUTREACH—NORTHWEST REGION

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BUILDING A #STRONGIOWA

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Websites for your Reference:

Ag Decision Maker

www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/

Iowa Beef Center

www.iowabeefcenter.org/

Manure Management

www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/

Iowa Pork Center

www.ipic.iastate.edu/

ISU Extension and Outreach Dairy Team

Looking Forward to Spring Field Work



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I had to sit down and write this article for March's Field & Feedlot well in advance of the time when you will be reading it. Today brings a warm front moving through NW Iowa, and it feels like we are starting the spring warm-up. I am not convinced it is here to stay (in fact, quite the opposite today), but it has me thinking spring!

Last year the window of opportunity for planting was a small one during the spring months for much of NW Iowa. Fall soil moisture analysis showed above normal moisture levels stored in the soils of almost the entire region, which might mean that a narrower than normal window of opportunity might be on the horizon for this spring, too. Planning for spring is one of those things you need to do at this time of year, and I encourage two plans. One plan would include what you would do if we have a "normal" spring. The other is if we have a short window again. In order to do that, I thought I would review what "normal" is from a couple of different perspectives.

"When is the last frost in the spring?" seems to be a common question. There is no exact date for that because we are dealing with weather, so we can never be certain. However, if you want to see what the history of the last spring frost has been during the last 30 years, try going to the "Useful to Useable" growing degree calculator page to take a look. This is a regional website put together by a cooperative effort of several Midwest universities, and gives you the power to see, by county, what is happening locally, based on data collected from local weather stations. You can find that web site here: <https://mygeohub.org/groups/u2u/gdd>.

For example, the Ida County average last frost date during the last 30 years (based on 28 degrees) is April 17. But, that means half the time it occurs after that date. Maybe a better number is the chance that 28 degrees only happens later than this date one out of ten years – which would be May 13. Compare that to a county closer to the Minnesota border. The 28-degree average frost date in the last 30 years for Lyon County is April 21, but the "one-in-ten" date is May 13, too. Other data sets have shown a bigger difference in the past, but this most recent 30-year set of data not only shows a little earlier date of the last frost, but it also seems to have shown a narrower range from north to south in NW Iowa.

"How many suitable days in the field can we expect each week?" Data from the Iowa Crop Report summaries from previous years can also give us those averages. In the Northwest Crop Reporting District's data from 1964 – 2013, we average 1.3 days of suitable field work weather during the first week of April, followed by 2.9 in week two, 3.1 in the third week of April, and 4.1 in week four. May averages about 4.6 days of suitable fieldwork per week. Think about those numbers when you calculate how rapidly you need to progress to be timely in your planting process.

ISU's Ag Decision Maker webpage (<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/>), under the crops/machinery tab, has more information on matching equipment to the needs you have for being timely at planting. Check them out!

Recent Trends in the Beef Industry



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As winter begins to wind down, I want to share some definite trends I've noticed.

Feeder Cattle Sales – Market volatility affected sale prices with total gross value of calves roughly 60 percent of two years ago. But, other important trends remain. Calves “greener” in their condition, larger lot sizes and uniformity of cattle within the lot still influence price. Luckily, cow-calf producers can manage these with changes in nutrition, “tight” breeding programs, and genetics.

In a survey conducted by the Iowa Beef Center and National Agricultural Statistics Service, feedlot producers were asked to rate what factors relative to feeder cattle are important to them. The top five factors and percent of feedlot producers rating that factor as important were: condition (93.8%), frame (91.0%), castrated (90.1%), weight (83.8%) and vaccination history (82.8%). At the pre-conditioned feeder cattle sales I attended this winter, 76 percent of the calves were green-tagged and 24 percent were gold-tagged, which is similar to the previous year.

Breeding Cattle Sales – These, too, have been affected by lower feeder and fed cattle prices. However, prices for bred heifers have picked up the past 10 weeks with improving fed cattle price. Sale averages within the various breeds at the Sioux Empire Farm Show and Iowa Beef Expo have been in the \$3200-3600 range.

That said there are some factors the industry needs to focus upon and select against. Structurally, some cattle were too straight in their hock, too shallow in their heel, small-footed or close at the hocks. From a reproductive standpoint, more cattle are appearing with pendulous sheaths and scrotal abnormalities such as smaller or twisted testicles. Breed character seems to be fading. Within a respective breed, odd color patterns and markings are becoming more prevalent.

Before the breeding season begins, cow-calf producers are advised to evaluate their herd for structure, reproductive soundness and breed character. And for cows and replacement heifers, I'd add one more important trait to the list – udders. The University of Nebraska has a fact sheet on udder scoring that can be downloaded from http://beef.unl.edu/learning/udder_score.shtml. It is recommended that cow udders be evaluated several times (calving, before breeding and weaning). A good time to evaluate replacement heifer udders is when yearling weights are taken.

Make plans now to attend these upcoming Beef Programs:

Cover Crops & Stocker Cattle Field Day
April 11, 2017
ISU Demonstration and Research Farm
(Allee Farm), Newell, IA
Featuring stocker cattle grazing cereal rye

Cattle Stewardship 2017
June 8, 2017
Dickinson County Fairgrounds, Spirit Lake, IA
Featuring Temple Grandin — National Expert
in Cattle Handling and Stewardship

New Publications:

Available from Ag Decision Maker (www.extension.iastate.edu/aqdm/):

- ⇒ Historic Hog and Lamb Prices (B2-10)
- ⇒ Historic Cattle Prices (B2-12)
- ⇒ Live Cattle Basis (B2-42)
- ⇒ Feeder Cattle Basis (B2-43)
- ⇒ Feeder Steer-Heifer Price Spread (B2-45)

Feeding CTC to Beef Cows:

<https://vetmed.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/VDPAM/Extension/Beef/2017%20CTC%20beef%20cows.pdf>

Feeding CTC to Feedlot Cattle

<https://vetmed.iastate.edu/sites/default/files/VDPAM/Extension/Beef/2017%20CTC%20feedlot%20cattle.pdf>

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Springtime is Prescribed Fire Time in Iowa



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Spring is just around the corner and that means it's time to get the planter ready and to start watching the fields for the right conditions to return after a long winter. But for many Iowa landowners, springtime means more than just planting season, it's prescribed fire season.

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Springtime is Prescribed Fire Time in Iowa *(continued)*

Iowa's native grasslands, forests, and wetlands were burned by Native Americans for thousands of years before European settlement. Therefore, most of Iowa's native plants, and the wildlife that depend on them, have become adapted to the flush of nutrients created by the combustion of previous year's plant growth and changes in plant structure that combustion creates. Fires create critical patches of bare ground that young birds like pheasants and quail feed in and can also be a tool to fight invasive weeds or trees in grass fields. Further, when there is sufficient growth remaining in pastures to carry a fire, burning enhances forage quality by stimulating new succulent and nitrogen-rich plant growth – a phenomenon that was once essential to bison in Iowa's native prairies and exploited by Native Americans that used fire to attract them for hunting.

Prescribed fire can be an important land management practice in a wide range of habitats. Grasslands, like Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields, idle areas on the farm, savannahs, or roadsides often benefit from fire every 3-5 years. Forested areas take longer to accumulate sufficient fuel to carry a fire and benefit from fire on longer intervals over 10-15 years. Landowners can gauge the need for prescribed fire in grasslands by the number of tree seedlings in the field or how thick the residual grasses from previous years' growth is at the ground level.

Prescribed fire requires careful planning, coordination with local authorities and neighbors, and close attention to weather patterns that can affect the way fire behaves once lit. Humidity affects the rate at which the fire burns. Winds propel the fire and fan the flames. Atmospheric conditions determine where the smoke goes.

Fuels should be cleared from fire breaks through raking, mowing, or disking around the field or woodlot and should be at least twice as wide as the length of the flames they are intended to halt.

All of these considerations should be carefully anticipated in a Burn Plan developed in advance of the fire and meticulously checked off the day of the burn to ensure all conditions are suitable and all preparations have been made. This will include communicating with the local fire department to notify them of your intent to burn and to inquire about local ordinances or restrictions. Also, if you are considering conducting a burn on land under a federal contract like CRP, be sure to check with your local USDA office to ensure it is an authorized practice. Plus, you can often find advice or even cost share opportunities through state or federal programs for habitat management practices like prescribed fire while at the USDA office.

If you satisfy all your check boxes, your fire should go off without a hitch, and you should reap the benefits for years to come, first watching the healthy plant growth return quickly this spring and then watching the wildlife or cattle respond positively to the reinvigorated vegetation for years to come.

To learn more about prescribed fire methods and use in Iowa, visit <http://www.nrem.iastate.edu/wildlife/managing-pasture-and-hay-wildlife> to download a series of articles about prescribed fire and get a link to a YouTube channel with how-to instructions for prescribed fire in Iowa.



Maximizing Manure in March



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Early spring is normally a bad time to be out on the land spreading manure because of the risk of compaction, and the short windows of time that soil conditions are favorable meaning that spreading manure will not damage the soil in low spots. This year might be the exception because of the warm early spring and very tight crop margins. The keys to making this a success are:

1. Only apply manure on firm soil that does not risk compaction.
2. Apply manure where you can fully use the nutrients, like on corn.
3. Make sure the soil is uniformly covered and that there are no missed locations where you should be applying manure.
4. Minimize complaints and ammonia loss by injecting and incorporating the manure into the soil.

Last year, one farmer noted that his spring-applied manure out-yielded the fall manure by 20 bushels/acre. While this is not common, it can happen especially if the soil conditions are good in the spring.